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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL KDEM TH

SUBJECT: HE'S BAAAAAAACK: THAKSIN COMES HOME

REF: A. BANGKOK 623 (RUMORS)

¶B. BANGKOK 607 (THAKSIN TO RETURN)

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra returned to Bangkok on February 28. He was granted bail on the charges pending against him. At a press conference, he said he had returned to clear his name, and he insisted he was done with politics, a claim that most here are unlikely to believe. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra arrived in Bangkok on a commercial flight from Hong Kong on the morning of February 28, accompanied by a number of his supporters (and his American lobbyist.) A happy crowd estimated at 3-4,000 people greeted him; there did not appear to be any opposition demonstrators. Thaksin kissed the ground, greeted the crowd, and departed the airport to report to the Supreme Court and the Office of the Attorney-General (OAG), where he made bail on the charges pending against him. In the case before the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Holders of Political Positions, he faces charges connected to the government sale of land to his wife while he was prime minister. At the OAG, he faces charges he concealed his ownership of shares in the SC Asset Corporation.

¶3. (C) Due to concerns about this security, Thaksin told the press that he would not be staying in his Bangkok home; he will reportedly be staying at the Peninsula Hotel. Thaksin told the press before his arrival that he planned to stay in Thailand only about two weeks before traveling abroad again. (One condition of his bail is that he not travel abroad without prior court approval.) Thaksin met with a small group of his supporters, then held a press conference. He complained that he and his family were being treated unjustly, and apologized for the troubles his supporters had to go through since the 2006 coup. He said he had come home to prove his innocence, and insisted he had no desire to return to the political stage. He just wanted to enjoy life with his family and die on Thai soil. His American lobbyist called the Ambassador to reiterate that Thaksin was "1000 percent committed" to not returning to politics.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The first stage of Thaksin's return has gone according to plan. It will be very hard for most people here to believe that Thaksin is really done with politics, especially given his fairly open role last month in choosing the current cabinet, and the steady pilgrimage of high officials he received during his self-imposed exile in London and Hong Kong. The focus will now be on the courts and law enforcement officials, and the degree to which they function

without political interference.

JOHN